[Country Club Crowd]

Men Against Granite

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DATE AUG 20 1940 COUNTRY CLUB CROWD

The clubhouse was set high in the hills. On all sides forested uplands rolled away, and on far horizons the mountains were banked against the sky. Here and there farmstead clearings broke the woods. The city itself was hidden, sweltering far below in its busy bowl, overridden with traffic, overburdened with sound and heat and the strife of everyday living. In the hills a clean breeze stirred the leaves and the sun tinged the green turf with gold. The golf course was picturesque, stretching over a varied and interesting terrain. Before the clubhouse, a long rambling building, handsome automobiles were parked about the circular gravel drive and in the yard, people hailed one another gayly and chatted in the shade of the [portcoohere?].

The people wore fashionable sports clothes and tans. Not the hard deep brown of the outdoor laborer and farmer, but the casual expensive tan of the idler and sportsman. Their worldliness was an echo from country clubs all over the nation, in big towns and small. They read the New Yorker, Esquire, Harper's [Bazaar?], and Vogue hastily and sketchily. Occasionally they found time to read best-selling novels. But the newspaper, metropolitan and locale was their bible. And in spite of this devotion to the press the outside world scarcely existed in their scheme of things. Their world was here in a smart club in the

green hills. And they contrasted sharply with their chosen background, pitifully small against the grandeur.

“Don't you like it here?” the girl said, tossing her bright head. “Oh, I think it's just marvelous. It always thrills me. I love Vermont in the summertime. Look at that view, look at those mountains.” She sighed long and deeply. “Oh, it's so lovely.” She paused, flashing a smile as she 2 exchanged greetings and inanities with some friends. “Shall we have a drink? It's swell on the back porch.”

They entered, dropped a few nickels in the slot-machines, passed on through the [fin?] spaciousness of the lounge. Three noisy young couples were jitter-bugging around the phonograph in one corner to the blare of banal music. The boys had crew haircuts and fresh impudent faces. There was something shallow and false in the gayety of the girls, their voices and laughter brittle, their faces proud and empty. They talked over-loudly of going back to college — to Yale, Dartmouth, Williams, Amherst; to Smith, Vassor, Radcliffe, Wellesley. Their forefathers had [hewn?] from the solid granite of Millstone Hill the money they were so freely spending.

The cool peace of the back veranda was broken by many voices, where an older set had gathered with ice tinkling in tall frosted glasses. They spoke of many things, always with an attempt at witticism. They spoke vaguely of the war in Europe, and someone told a dirty story about Hitler. They talked about the World's Fair in New York; local golf tournaments; weekends at the cottage, the pond, the lake; recent drinking parties; dances, poker games, dice games. One woman spoke with undeniable relish of a particularly gruesome auto accident, and this precipitated a whole flood of bloody smash-ups and sudden deaths on the highway. They turned to gossip then: Jimmy was drinking himself to death since his wife left him... Phyllis had gone away an a vacation, but she was really going to have a baby... Bernard must be blind not to see that his wife was in love with Doc Goss... They say Helen lost her job because she kept running around with that married man, what's-his-mane?... Did you hear the latest about Mary Jane!... Somebody saw them leaving a hotel

together in Montreal... I don't see how that girl gets away with the things she does, honest to 3 God... The Fairfields owe everybody in town... She was so drunk it was positively disgusting [?] stinko... She'll go with anybody, do anything, there's nothing too low for her since she found out about her husband... They say that she actually... Just imagine a man of his age with that young Goddard girl...

The country club ladies told stories, then, that would have made the Italian women of Granite Street blush with shame.

There were the young married set and the middle-aged married set. They lived in elaborate homes on the terraces of Trow Hill. They wore expensive clothes and drove expensive automobiles. They traveled together eternally, and nobody outside the circle mattered or even existed. There was nothing beyond the rounds they made — weekend parties, cocktails, in the Cellar Grill, Italian dinners at the Venetian, tripe to New York and Montreal, skiing in the winter and golfing in the summer.

In one way or another their money had come from granite.

There were granite manufacturers, quarry and shed owners, who had inherited all that their fathers, rough strong men with steel-sharp minds and steel-sinewed hands, had sweated and died for. There were lawyers, doctors, dentists, bankers, businessmen, who had been educated with the money wrought from monumental stone. The beautiful [ceusteries?] of Barre were filled with the men, prematurely dead, who had drilled and chiseled and carved the granite, that these people might live in ease and luxury.

The country club was a far cry from the clamor of the grim sheds on the river flats. And if these people did not scorn the stonecutters, it was simply because they ignored them altogether. 4 Downstairs in the dim coolness of the locker room a poker game was in progress on a glass-ringed table. Men with soft hands and flabby faces nonchalantly lost or won the amount that a stonecutter might earn in a full-time week. A week in the ear-shattering chaos of the shads, standing on a wet dirt floor, bending patiently over a block,

guiding into intricate patterns a pneumatic tool that shuddered with a hundred-pounds pressure.

Upstairs the swing music went on, but the young couples slouched and sprawled about, glasses in languid brown hands. On the porch the session continued and most of the women were showing their drinks. Laughter and voices were shriller and louder, jokes were coarser... They mentioned John [Steinbock's?] Grapes of Wrath, and the fat woman said she found it unspeakably filthy and vile. A man proclaimed it nothing but propoganda. Another man [accounced?] feebly that he thought it a damn fine book. The subject was dropped.

The girl had thick blond hair, which the summer sun had bleached to several shades. She had a mild forehead, pale blue eyes set well apart, and a wide generous mouth. Her face was rather square and plain, brightened by the smile. She had something of the attractive homeliness of Miriam Hopkins. Her figure was fine and strong, full-breasted and sturdy, with graceful legs and hands. She moved with the lithe ease of the trained athlete. In thought she frowned and bowed her golden head, the broad brow wrinkled.

“Lots of people have told me I look like Miriam Hopkins,” she said. “Of course I know I don't really... Did you know that she went to school here? Yes, she went to Goddard, in the early 1920's. I think it was. And 5 you remember Thelma Todd, the actress who was found dead in her car a few years ago? She used to live up on the Hill, in Websterville. Some of her folks still live there.

“I was born here — up on the Hill, Graniteville. I've lived here most of my life, except for a few years we lived in northern New York State. And a couple of years in New York City. I love New York. I used to spend my summers in Detroit, that's where my father is now. I don't like Detroit at all. I hate the place. My mother — my mother died when I was very young. She was only twenty-six — my age now. I can't remember her.

“My grandfather brought us up, my brother and I. He had eight children of his own, and then he had us besides. He was a wonderful man, one of the finest. He came over here from Sweden and settled in Graniteville. He started with nothing and before he was through he had raised and educated two families really — and he left my grandmother quite a bit of money and property. He was in the granite business, opened a quarry on the Hill after awhile. He worked his way up from the bottom all right. He was my mother's father and the grandest person I ever know. He was so good, so kind and generous, so gentle and strong. I guess he was the best friend I'll ever have...

“The other side of the family — my father's — is Scotch. Of course you can see that the Swedish strain predominates in me!”

“In those days the Hill was quite a place. There were some fine old families and some nice homes. It's different since the French came in. Most of the old families are gone now. There's a different class of people there, and it shows in their houses, the way they live. But I guess I'll always love it up on the Hill. 6 “Even after my grandfather owned a quarry he went on working with the men. He'd do things himself that be wouldn't ask the men to do. Once he climbed the [mast?] of a big boom-derrick that overhung a quarryhole hundreds of feet deep. Something had to be fixed up there, and he went up and did it. nobody else would do it. His men worshipped him, the old-timers still talk about him. Everybody liked my grandfather, except those who always dislike anyone who in good, honest, straightforward, and unafraid. I learned more from him than I ever learned in school. He wanted me to go to college, but I was foolish enough not to go.” She gestured expressively. “All this... I was young. I was having too good a time here, I suppose. I was a fool, all right.

“I took a post-graduate year in high school because I couldn't make up my mind. I was simply crazy about basketball. I captained my team and made All-New England guard one year. Aren't I the immodest hussy, though? And now It's golf and skiing. But one has to do something after school is past. Then I went to a private finishing school in New York, and I

took up Nurses' Training for a time. After that I went to Katherine Ginne! That was always my trouble. I could never make up my mind what I really wanted.

“Now I have a good-enough job working for the State. But it's maddening work, all monotonous routine, pure stagnation. Most of the girls think it's perfectly swell. [Good?] jobs, good pay, the prestige of working for the State, money for clothes and hairdressers. But it drives me crazy sometimes.

“Most of my girl-friends are about my age and work in the some sort of offices. Some are college graduates and some are not. It doesn't seem to make any difference. Quite a few of the girls have been married recently. 7 The rest of us will no doubt drift on into the thirties, bachelor-girls still. Unless some Lochinvar looms suddenly and unexpectedly an the scene. White-collar girls like Kitty Foyle.

“I nearly got married once, a few years ago. I was to meet him in New York and we were to be married there. But I couldn't go through with it. Maybe I'll be sorry someday, but I don't think so. I know lots of girls get married just for the sake of being married, the security. They're afraid to face thirty still single, afraid of being old maids. If I marry it will be a man I love. And if I never meet him I'll stay an old maid, and to hell with them all.

“Those people there, they talk about me the same way when I'm not around. I know it. And they talk about each other exactly the same. I've always been talked about, ever since I was in high school. Because I never cared much what people thought or said. My grandfather always [told?] me that that didn't matter. He said what mattered was inside yourself.

“They're wondering now who you are, where you come from, what college you went to, how much money you have, what you do for a living. They won't be satisfied until they find out.

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“I didn't realize until lately how sick and tired I'm getting of them, of all this. It's so damned small and smug, so narrow and mean. And they're so completely satisfied with it.

“Yes, it's quite true that this money they fling around all came from granite, directly or indirectly. Everything that they have they owe to the granite. And you should see their nostrils twitch when some stonecutters come into the Venetian after work and take a table next to theirs. 8 “One thing I do enjoy is this — the stonecutters are as scornful of them as they are of the stonecutters. And they don't mind showing it either.

“Of course some of these country club people are very nice, very fine. Some of the wealthiest ones are the best — real aristocrats of blood and money. Those kind are pretty regular and decent, broad-minded and understanding, wholly unpretentious. It's easy to tell them from the fakes.

“You want be get out of here? Well, I don't know that I blame you. People can spoil the lovliest places, can't they!"

The session at the other end of the porch was getting louder and [bawdier?] all the time. Shouts of laughter drowned the clink of ice in glasses. A sweet breeze from the woodlands passed unnoticed across flushed cheeks. A strong reek of perfume lingered like nausea in the head. The clouds [above?] the western mountains were pink and lavender in the lowering sun.

And down in the valley beside the river the terrific din of the granite sheds was stilled; the silence of closing time hung heavy on the dust-laden air. Out of the long gloomy sheds straggled the workers, dust-covered, grime-smeared, with weary eyes and faces, cramped hands, aching backs, and damp stiff legs. The riot of noise still throbbed in their skulls, the vibration of high-pressure tools still trembled through their arms and bodies.

But as they walked away the voices started, accents from Italy, Scotland, Spain, Ireland, and Sweden. And rich laughter rang in the slant of afternoon sunlight. The laughter of

strong men coming from a hard day's work. The laughter of the unconquered and the unconquerable.

It was true. They were as oblivious of the country club crowd as the club was of them.

The girl stared out over green treetops and smooth golden fields to the distant ramparts of the mountains, blue, gray and purple against the 9 transient colors of the western sky.

“Well anyway,” she said. “it's a beautiful country — Vermont. That's one thing we have — always.”